

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To:

From: California Dept. of Transportation,  
Central Region

\_\_\_\_\_  
(leave blank—will be filled in with Responsible/Trustee  
Agency)  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
2015 East Shields, Suite 100  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fresno, CA 93726-5428  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**

*Reference:* California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Project Title: State Route 1 HOV Lane Widening Project

Project Location: SR 1 in Santa Cruz County for a distance of approximately 8.25 miles between Larkin Valley/San Andreas Roads at the south and Morrissey Boulevard at the north

Project Description: • Widen the existing four-lane highway to a six-lane facility by adding one northbound and one southbound HOV lane

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency in cooperation with the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC)<sup>1</sup> in preparing an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project. A combined CEQA EIR and NEPA Environmental Assessment is being prepared. This Notice of Preparation package is being transmitted also to federal agencies to solicit their comments regarding the scope of the NEPA document.

A more detailed project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please direct your response to:

Duane Garrett  
Caltrans, Central Region  
2015 East Shields, Suite 100  
Fresno, CA 93726-5428  
Telephone: 559-243-8306

with a copy to: Kim Shultz  
SCCRTC  
1523 Pacific Avenue  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
Telephone: 831-460-3208

Please supply us with the name for a contact person in your agency.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> The SR1 HOV Lane Widening Project will be transferred to the Highway 1 Construction Authority, a Joint Powers Agency that will assume full responsibility for project development and implementation in Fiscal Year 04-05.

## **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report State Route 1 HOV Lane Widening Project**

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) is working in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the state lead agency, to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the State Route 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane Widening Project. This Notice of Preparation requests comments from responsible and trustee agencies regarding the significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures that need to be discussed in the Draft EIR to address each agency's concerns. An Initial Study has not been prepared for this project and is, therefore, not attached to this Notice of Preparation.

### **Background**

State Route 1 (SR 1) serves as the primary route connecting communities in the southern and central areas of Santa Cruz County. SR 1 links Watsonville, Aptos, Santa Cruz and University of California at Santa Cruz and is the southern terminus for State Routes 9 and 17, both of which bring heavy tourist traffic to coastal destinations in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties. The population of Santa Cruz County has doubled in the past 30 years. During this time, no capacity enhancements have been constructed within the project limits, and in recent decades, this segment of SR 1 has become heavily congested during morning and evening commute times. The 2001 Regional Transportation Plan identifies widening SR 1 between Aptos and Santa Cruz as the highest priority project in Santa Cruz County. The first phase of improvements to SR 1 is the 1/17 Merge Lanes Project with construction anticipated in Summer 2005 under Caltrans direction.

### **Project Description**

The project extends along SR 1 in Santa Cruz County a distance of approximately 8.25 miles; the project limits are from 0.4 kilometers (0.2 miles) south of San Andreas/Larkin Valley Roads to 0.3 kilometers (0.2 miles) north of Morrissey Boulevard. The project location and vicinity are shown on Attachments 1 and 2, respectively. In addition to the two interchanges at the project limits, there are interchanges at Soquel Avenue, 41st Avenue, Bay Avenue/Porter Street, Park Avenue, State Park Drive, Rio Del Mar Boulevard, and Freedom Boulevard (nine interchanges total). The following improvements are proposed within the project limits:

- Widen the existing four-lane highway to a six-lane facility to accommodate one northbound and one southbound HOV lane,
- Provide ramp metering,
- Provide Traffic Operations System (TOS) equipment,
- Modify interchanges to improve merging opportunities and ramp geometrics as follows:
  - Lengthen acceleration/deceleration lanes,
  - Improve sight distances,
  - Replace the railroad overpass structures and widen the current roadway bridges to accommodate highway widening.

Most of the proposed widening would be constructed in the median under Alternative 2B. At locations where the median width is insufficient, the required widening would be at the outside shoulder. Where frontage roads are adjacent to SR 1, sound walls on safety-shaped barriers would be constructed to separate the two facilities and minimize right-of-way acquisition. Concrete barriers would separate the northbound and southbound lanes, while striping would separate HOV from mixed-flow lanes.

## **Project Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the SR 1 HOV Lane Widening Project is to reduce congestion, encourage carpooling and use of alternative transportation modes as means to increase transportation system capacity, and improve safety. Meeting these project purposes would also address the following related needs:

- Improve operations – peak period congestion currently extends up to eight hours on weekdays,
- Reduce delay for commuters, commerce, and emergency vehicles,
- Provide incentives to increase transit use and ridesharing,
- Reduce congestion-related accidents, and
- Reduce “cut-through” traffic on local streets.

## **Alternatives Under Consideration**

In addition to the No-Build Alternative (Alternative 1), two Build Alternatives (Alternatives 2A and 2B) are under consideration. Alternative 2A would provide a standard median width of 6.6 meters (21.6 feet). Alternative 2B would provide a reduced median width of 1.8 meters (5.9 feet), which would accommodate 0.6-meter (2-foot) inside shoulders and the concrete median barrier.

## **Anticipated Benefits and Environmental Effects**

Widening the highway to accommodate HOV lanes would encourage the use of carpools and express buses. Because HOV facilities transport more riders in fewer vehicles, congestion and delay during peak travel periods would be reduced. The project is expected also to reduce congestion and improve operations on local arterials that currently carry “cut-through” traffic diverted from congested highway conditions. Reduced congestion and improved operations along SR 1 are anticipated to increase safety and reduce congestion-related accidents.

Widening the highway may affect wetlands and waterways within the project limits as well as special-status plant species and habitat for special-status wildlife species, potentially including California red-legged frog, tidewater goby, and steelhead. HOV lane widening will be designed to avoid the Valencia lagoon, which is a known breeding location for Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, and its associated upland habitat, insofar as possible. The project will be designed to accommodate upland drainage improvements to facilitate long-term maintenance requirements of the Valencia channel.

Historic resources adjacent to SR 1 are listed in the California Inventory of Historic Places and/or the City of Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey; such resources may be protected under Section 4(f) of the DOT Act. Archaeological sites are likely on or adjacent to the project area. Some areas within the project limits indicate high sensitivity for the discovery of paleontological resources. Widening the highway may increase noise levels at residences and other sensitive receptors and is expected to introduce changes to the visual character of the corridor. Mitigation is anticipated to address noise, visual, cultural, biological, and paleontological impacts.

## **Public Meeting**

Agency and public meetings will be held to announce the initiation of studies and solicit input regarding potentially significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures. The South Corridor Public Information Meeting will be held on April 26, 2004, at Sea Cliff Inn located at 7500 Old Dominion Circle, in Aptos. This meeting will be open from 3:00 to 4:30 PM for agencies and 6:00 to 8:30 PM for the general public. The North Corridor Public Information Meeting will be held on April \_\_, 2004 at [[location to be filled in]] at [[address to be

filled in]]. This meeting will be open to the general public from 6:00 to 8:30 PM. The format for the public meetings offers an open house and map viewing from 6:00 until 7:00 PM, with a formal presentation followed by a question and answer period from 7:00 until 8:30 PM.

The purpose of these meetings is to provide responsible and trustee agency staff and the public an opportunity to comment on project alternatives, impacts, and issues to be considered as part of the project studies. Presentations will describe the project alternatives, environmental review process, project schedule, and project cost and funding. Graphics will be presented to assist the public in visualizing the proposed limits of project construction. Opportunities will be offered for comments to be provided either orally or in writing, and future opportunities for public involvement will be outlined. Agency representatives, interested organizations, and the general public are invited to attend.

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